1.a. **Full Title**: Burden and prognosis of diabetic foot infection: the Atherosclerosis Risk in Communities (ARIC) Study

b. **Abbreviated Title (Length 26 characters)**: Burden and prognosis of diabetic foot infection

2. **Writing Group**:
   Writing group members: Michael Fang, Jiaqi Hu, Elizabeth Selvin, Kunihiro Matsushita, Caitlin Hicks

I, the first author, confirm that all the coauthors have given their approval for this manuscript proposal. MF [please confirm with your initials electronically or in writing]

First author: Michael Fang  
Address: 2024 E Monument Street, Baltimore, MD 21205  
Phone: (410) 955-4156  
Fax:  
E-mail: mfang9@jhu.edu

**ARIC author** to be contacted if there are questions about the manuscript and the first author does not respond or cannot be located (this must be an ARIC investigator).

Name: Elizabeth Selvin  
Address: 2024 E Monument Street, Baltimore, MD 21205  
Phone: (410) 955-4156  
E-mail: eselvin@jhu.edu

3. **Timeline**:

- Data cleaning and analysis: ~Aug-Sept 2021  
- Manuscript drafting: ~Sept-Nov, 2021  
- Manuscript revisions: ~Nov-Jan 2022  
- Manuscript submission to ARIC: ~Feb 2022

4. **Rationale**:

Foot infections occur frequently among people with diabetes and significantly elevate the risk of lower-extremity amputations. The incidence of lower-extremity amputations among US adults with diabetes has experienced a dramatic resurgence, declining by 43% from 2000 to 2009 before increasing by 50% from 2009 to 2015.\(^1\) Characterizing the burden of diabetic foot...
infection (DFI) can enhance the prevention and management of foot complications, which may reduce rates of amputations at a population-level.

It is widely believed that 15-25% of people with diabetes will develop at least one foot infection during their lifetime. However, these estimates are derived from older, retrospective studies of clinical populations. Contemporary estimates based on prospective data from the general population are lacking, and little is known about which populations have the highest risk of DFI.

The long-term consequences of DFI are also not well understood. Along with amputations, emerging evidence suggests DFI may be associated with an increased risk of other complications, including cardiovascular disease, mortality, and falls. However, existing studies are based on small clinical samples with short follow-up and limited adjustment for confounding. As a result, it is unclear whether this association reflects a “causal” relationship or whether DFI is simply a marker of poor underlying health.

Drawing on over two decades of data from a large community-based study, our objectives were to (1) characterize the burden of and risk factors for DFI; and (2) assess the subsequent risk of cardiovascular disease and mortality following the onset of DFI.

5. Main Hypothesis/Study Questions:

Research question 1: What is the burden of and risk factors for DFI in older adults?

- Hypothesis: We hypothesize that the burden of DFI will be substantial, particularly among participants who are older, low socioeconomic status (SES), or Black and those with a long duration of diabetes and poor glycemic control.

Research question 2: What is the association between incident DFI and risk of cardiovascular disease and mortality?

- Hypothesis: We hypothesize DFI will be independently associated with an increased risk for cardiovascular disease and mortality.

6. Design and analysis (study design, inclusion/exclusion, outcome and other variables of interest with specific reference to the time of their collection, summary of data analysis, and any anticipated methodologic limitations or challenges if present).

Study design: For research question 1, we will characterize the crude rate and 5-, 10-, 15-, and 20-year cumulative incidence of DFI, overall and by key demographic (age, sex, race, SES) and clinical characteristics (duration of diabetes, glycemic control). We will also examine the burden of different types of DFI (e.g., infection with or without wound). We will estimate Cox regression models to examine the association between traditional and novel risk factors with DFI. Our analyses will progress from minimally adjusted (demographics only) to fully adjusted models (demographics + cardiometabolic risk factors + health behaviors + SES and health care utilization).
For research question 2, we will estimate Cox regression models to assess the association between incident DFI and subsequent risk of cardiovascular disease and mortality. Our analyses will similarly progress from minimally adjusted to fully adjusted models. For all analyses, we will examine effect modification by race, age, and sex, respectively.

We will conduct several sensitivity analyses. First, we will reconduct all analyses using only participants who were using Medicare fee-for-service (FFS, Part B). As we note in the limitations, one issue is that some participants may be using health plans other than Medicare FFS and thus may not be captured in Medicare claims data. Second, we will compare baseline characteristics for participants using Medicare FFS with those using other health plans.

**Inclusion/Exclusion:** We will include all participants at ARIC visit 4 with (1) diabetes (self-reported diagnosis, use of glucose lowering medication, or a fasting glucose $\geq 126$ mg/dl); (2) no history of DFI; and (3) no missing information on key covariates. For analyses of incident cardiovascular events, we will exclude participants with prevalent cardiovascular disease in the main analyses. In sensitivity analyses, we re-run our analyses with these participants included.

**Outcomes:** The main outcome for research question 1 is incident DFI. Consistent with prior research, this event will be captured using ICD-9/10 codes in the primary diagnostic position from hospital discharge records collected from active ARIC study surveillance and hospitalizations, emergency department visits, and ambulance use from Medicare claims. A complete list of the ICD codes used to define this measure used are shown in Table 1. Data sources used to identify DFI are available until December 31, 2018.

Inpatient and outpatient claims were available for participants aged 65 or older using Medicare FFS. For participants enrolled in Medicare but not using FFS (i.e., Medicare Part C), inpatient claims were available after 2008. Because most DFIs are addressed in outpatient settings, we would significantly underestimate the burden of DFI without analyzing Medicare claims. Further, these data substantially increase our statistical power, enabling us to examine the association between DFI and different complications.

For research question 2, the primary outcomes are incident cardiovascular disease (any and different subtypes) and mortality (all-cause and cause-specific). Incident coronary heart disease will be defined as fatal and non-fatal coronary heart disease, definite or probable myocardial infarction, and silent myocardial infarction. Incident stroke will be defined as definite or probable ischemic or hemorrhagic stroke. Both coronary heart disease and stroke events were adjudicated by an expert panel. Heart failure was identified from ICD-9 codes (428) from hospitalization discharge records from 1988-2004, and by adjudication thereafter. Any cardiovascular disease will be defined as coronary heart disease, stroke or heart failure.

All-cause mortality will be determined through linkage to the National Death Index, phone interviews with participant proxies, and review of state records. Cause-specific mortality (cardiovascular, cancer, and infection mortality) will be identified using ICD-9/10 codes listed as the underlying cause of death in death certificates.

We will also consider two secondary outcomes as part of research question 2. The first is non traumatic lower-limb amputations (any amputation, major amputation, minor amputation), and
the second is falls (any fall, hospitalized fall, and fall with fracture). These events will be identified using ARIC hospitalization and CMS claims data.

**Exposure:** For research question 1, we will examine the following risk factors:

- Age, sex, race
- Household income ($>50,000; $25,000-$49,999; $12,000-$24,999; <$12,000)
- Education (graduate/professional school; college with or without completion; high school/GED/vocational school; <high school)
- Area deprivation index (quartiles)
- SES (composite measure based on household income, education, and area deprivation index)
- Health insurance type
- Health care utilization (access to routine care; frequency of care)
- Duration of diabetes
- Glycemic control (tertiles of fructosamine because HbA1c not available at visit 4)
- Peripheral artery disease based on ABI $\leq$ 0.9
- Retinopathy based on fundus photography in visit 3
- Prevalent CVD
- Hypertension (>140/90 mm Hg or use of medication)
- Lipids (tertiles of HDL, LDL, triglycerides)
- Inflammation (CRP $>3$ mg/L)
- Obesity status
- Smoking and drinking
- Cognitive status (global cognitive z-score)
- Troponin I and T
- Elevated albuminuria (ACR>30)
- Reduced kidney function (eGFR<60)

For research question 2, the main exposure will be DFI, which will we treat as a time-varying measure. The definition of DFI is described above.

**Covariates:** Our analyses will adjust for demographics (age, sex, race-center), health behaviors (alcohol consumption, smoking), cardiometabolic measures (body-mass index, hypertension status, HDL and LDL cholesterol levels, glycemic control) and SES and health care utilization.

**Challenges/limitations:** (1) Unmeasured confounding: Because this is an observational study, one of the main issues is unmeasured differences in those who do versus do not develop DFI.

(2) Measurement of DFI: Because DFI is measured from hospitalization discharge records and claims data, less severe cases will likely be missed. There may also be misclassification, as events were based on ICD codes and not adjudicated.

(3) Differences in Medicare eligibility and utilization: Medicare claims data may not fully capture DFI in the study population because (1) some participants were under age 65 at baseline.
(visit 4) and thus were ineligible for Medicare during some portion of the follow up; and (2) some participants aged ≥65 elected to use other health plans (e.g., HMOs) rather than Medicare FFS. For research question 1, missing these events likely means we will understate the true burden of DFI. For research question 2, it is unclear how these issues may affect the true association between DFI and cardiovascular disease and mortality.

As we note above, we will reconduct all analyses only including participants who were enrolled in Medicare FFS. We will also compare baseline characteristics for all participants over age 65 at baseline that did versus did not use Medicare FFS. Consistent with prior ARIC analyses, we do not expect to find major between the two groups.

(4) Race/geography: Our analyses will examine differences in DFI risk between Black and White participants. However, racial differences are confounded by study sites, as only Forsyth recruited both Black and White participants. Thus, we cannot determine whether any differences are related to race or region. We also will not assess for racial differences beyond Black/White.

7.a. Will the data be used for non-ARIC analysis or by a for-profit organization in this manuscript? ____ Yes    X No

    b. If Yes, is the author aware that the current derived consent file ICTDER05 must be used to exclude persons with a value RES_OTH and/or RES_DNA = “ARIC only” and/or “Not for Profit”? ____ Yes    ____ No
    (The file ICTDER has been distributed to ARIC PIs, and contains the responses to consent updates related to stored sample use for research.)

8.a. Will the DNA data be used in this manuscript? ____ Yes    X No

8.b. If yes, is the author aware that either DNA data distributed by the Coordinating Center must be used, or the current derived consent file ICTDER05 must be used to exclude those with value RES_DNA = “No use/storage DNA”? ____ Yes    ____ No

9. The lead author of this manuscript proposal has reviewed the list of existing ARIC Study manuscript proposals and has found no overlap between this proposal and previously approved manuscript proposals either published or still in active status. ARIC Investigators have access to the publications lists under the Study Members Area of the web site at: http://www.cscc.unc.edu/aric/mantrack/maintain/search/dtSearch.html

    X Yes    _______ No

10. What are the most related manuscript proposals in ARIC (authors are encouraged to contact lead authors of these proposals for comments on the new proposal or collaboration)?

    MS 3215: Traditional and Novel Risk Factors for Peripheral Neuropathy in the ARIC Study
MS 3531: Lifetime risk estimate and prognostic impact of nontraumatic lower-extremity amputation

Both papers examine risk factors for related but different lower-extremity outcomes. Additionally, the first and senior author of MS3215 and the senior author of M3531 are collaborators for our current paper.

11.a. Is this manuscript proposal associated with any ARIC ancillary studies or use any ancillary study data? X Yes  ____ No

11.b. If yes, is the proposal
   ___  A. primarily the result of an ancillary study (list number* _________)
   ___  B. primarily based on ARIC data with ancillary data playing a minor role
          (usually control variables; list number(s)* 2009.16)

*ancillary studies are listed by number https://sites.cscc.unc.edu/aric/approved-ancillary-studies

12a. Manuscript preparation is expected to be completed in one to three years. If a manuscript is not submitted for ARIC review at the end of the 3-years from the date of the approval, the manuscript proposal will expire.

12b. The NIH instituted a Public Access Policy in April, 2008 which ensures that the public has access to the published results of NIH funded research. It is your responsibility to upload manuscripts to PubMed Central whenever the journal does not and be in compliance with this policy. Four files about the public access policy from http://publicaccess.nih.gov/ are posted in http://www.cscc.unc.edu/aric/index.php, under Publications, Policies & Forms. http://publicaccess.nih.gov/submit_process_journals.htm shows you which journals automatically upload articles to PubMed central.
References


## Table 1: List of ICD-9/10 codes used to define DFI

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